Unit .33

Session .03

The Church Is United in Faith

Scripture

Galatians 3:1-6, 10-14,21-26

1 You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? **2** I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? **3** Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh? **4** Did you experience so much for nothing—if in fact it was for nothing? **5** So then, does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law? Or is it by believing what you heard— **6** just like Abraham who **believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness?** ... **10** For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, **Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed.** **11** Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because **the righteous will live by faith.** **12** But the law is not based on faith; instead, **the one who does these things will live by them.** **13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, **Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.** **14** The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promised Spirit through faith. ... **21** Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. **23** Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. **24** The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. **25** But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, **26** for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God's children live by faith.

Option 1

Note: this activity asks students to open some sensitive desires. You may wish not to do it if your group isn't close or has some negative culture to it.

Pass out an index card and a writing utensil to each student. On that index card, students should write down a phrase or a sentence they would love to hear from someone important in their life. It might be, "You're pretty," or, "You're good enough for me," or, "I'm proud of you." The cards should remain anonymous; students should not write their names. If students do not feel comfortable writing anything down, don't make them.

Collect the cards in a plastic or paper bag and shuffle them up really well. Draw a few out and read aloud [redacted]omfortable discussing, ask why they think we long to hear such things.

[redacted]y those things to us. Why or why not? Tell them that every legitimate desire for approval is ours in Christ Jesus. If we trust Jesus, God is proud of us, and thinks we are lovely, and delights in us: all because when He looks at us, He sees Jesus.

Too often, people spend their lives working to hear these phrases from authority figures. In today's session, we'll see how Paul warns us that we can never earn these phrases or salvation from God. We can't keep the Law; instead, we receive all these phrases and every other blessing by trusting in Jesus.

Break your students into small groups. They should pretend they are budding comedians who produce comedy sketches. They have three options for their sketches:

- Five Ways to Make Things Right
- Five Ways to Stop the Hiccups
- Five Ways to Break Out of Prison

They should pick one of the three titles and make their skit. They are welcome to use whatever setting they wish. For the making-things-right skit, they could give advice on how a boyfriend could make things up to a girlfriend. For the hiccup skit, they might make their sketch set in a school classroom or movie theater. For the breaking out of prison skit, they might set their sketch in a medieval dungeon or a modern day prison. The goal is to produce something funny.

Let them prepare and share their skits. Did the ideas they promoted require a lot of effort and work? If they had the option to make things right, to stop the hiccups, or to break out of prison just by trusting someone or something, would that option be easier than what they thought of? In today's lesson, we'll see that even our best efforts aren't enough to justify us (make us right), to break the curse of the law, or to set us free from bondage. The good news is that simply trusting in Jesus as Lord will do all those things.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Galatians 3:1-6

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul is disturbed by how quickly they have turned from grace to the law, which means they turned back to the rules of the old covenant. In the old covenant, the only way to turn to God was to become Jewish, spiritually and culturally. But thanks to Jesus' sacrifice, we can have a relationship with God apart from becoming externally, culturally Jewish. Abraham, to whom the promises were given and from whom the Jewish people descend, was himself counted righteous through faith. Why, then, would his descendants, biological or spiritual (Gal. 3:7), be saved by the law? Paul's answer is clear—they wouldn't. Salvation is a matter of faith from start to finish.

- **Many Christians act as though faith is the first step into the Christian life, but not the whole of it. Why is that?**

Paul reminded them of their own conversion, and then said, "after beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh (Gal. 3:3)?" Salvation is by faith from beginning to end. Too often, we act like we were saved by grace, but must grow and mature through law. Growth and maturity are the result of our union with Christ through faith. This is achieved through faith instead of law because our new life in Christ rests not on our works, but on the gracious gift of His Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:3).

Read Galatians 3:10-14

Any attempt to be made righteous through the law will fail. If you fail to meet all of its demands, you incur its judgments and curse. It is this need for perfect adherence to the law that leads Paul to say with full assurance, "no one is justified before God by the law" (Gal. 3:11). So does God let us off the hook? No! Jesus took the curse that our law-breaking deserved. Through faith in Jesus, God counts us as righteous.

- **How would you try to explain the idea of even one sin making us guilty before God to someone who is unfamiliar with the gospel?**

Sometimes we take our familiarity with the gospel for granted, but God wants us to share the gospel with people who have little understanding of these concepts. Paul said that if you don't keep the whole law, you are cursed. Think of it like a meal. If there's a bug or a hair on just one part of your sandwich or salad, it makes the whole thing bad. That's just one little illustration, but maybe your group can think of other ways of demonstrating this concept that unchurched people could understand and relate to.

- **How would you explain the idea of Jesus redeeming us from the curse by being cursed Himself to someone who is unfamiliar with the gospel?**

Challenge your group to explain this concept in a way that unchurched people could understand and relate to. Paul says he was "using a human illustration" (Gal. 3:15). He wanted his readers to understand, so he spoke in images they could relate to. It may be helpful to explain the gospel using the concept of paying a debt or being willing to take someone else's place (think of Katniss and Primrose in *The Hunger Games*).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's children live by faith.

Galatians 3

3:1-6. "At the heart of the Protestant faith is the conviction that there is nothing we contribute to our salvation but our sin, no merit we bring but Christ's, and nothing necessary for justification except faith alone."[1]

3:3. "Consider verse 3 very carefully. It is not directed to those who are yet to start the Christian life. It is written for us who began some time ago and are now in grave danger of trying to live the Christian life in a way that nullifies grace and leads to destruction. The point of the verse is that you must go on in the Christian life the same way you started it. Since we began by the work of the Spirit, we must go on relying on the Spirit. The essence of the Galatian heresy is the teaching that you begin the Christian life by faith, and then you grow in the Christian life by works, that is, by drawing on powers in yourself to make your contribution to salvation."[2]

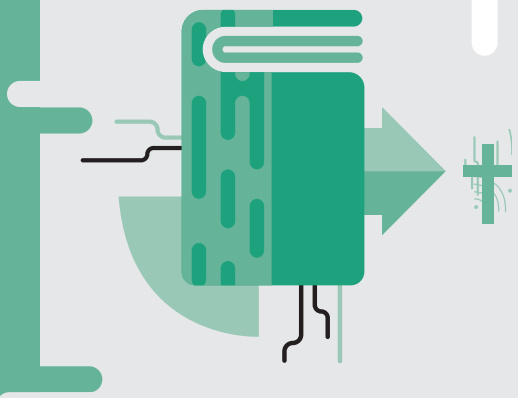
3:10-14. "The point here is that unless you obey everything in God's law, you're under his judgment. His righteous nature demands it. As James says, "Whoever keeps the entire law and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. Paul continues to point to the Old Testament to underscore the idea that justification comes through faith, not through the law."[3]

"There is an inherent blasphemy in seeking to add to what Christ Jesus in his dying moments declared to be finished or improve that in which the Lord Jehovah finds perfect sanctification."[4]

"A simpler and more familiar solution for the problem of how God can be just and still justify the unjust is found in the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is that, through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied when God spares a sinner. Redemptive theology teaches that mercy does not become effective towards a man until justice has done its work. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our Substitute died for us on the cross. However unpleasant this may sound to the ear of the natural man, it has ever been sweet to the ear of faith."[5]

(p. 97, DDG) Christ Connection

Paul wrote to the church in Galatia to remind them that faith, not works, is the foundation of the gospel. Through the completed work of Jesus living a sinless life, dying to pay for our sin, and rising again in new life, we can be saved solely by grace through faith.



TEACHING PLAN

Read Galatians 3:21-26

Even though we cannot be saved through the law, that doesn't mean the law was bad or that it didn't serve a purpose. God never intended to save us through the law (Gal. 3:21). He gave the written law as a temporary guardian until Jesus came, who would give us His Spirit and write His law on our hearts.

▪ What was the purpose of the law?

The law reveals our sin, but it cannot free us from its power. Only the righteousness of Christ and the redemption that comes through Him can set us free. Only the gift of the Spirit can provide the power for us to live as the children of God. But the law did serve a purpose. It was a temporary guardian (a foster parent of sorts) until we were adopted as God's children through the gospel. Can you imagine being a true child of God now and wanting to be the way you were before, or having great parents, but wishing you only had a babysitter? That is unthinkable.

▪ How should our status as children of God affect our relationship with sin?

Freedom from law does not mean we are free to sin. The children of God should show the world what their Father is like. God's law is the overflow of His own character, and our lives ought to look like Christ, who was the perfect fulfillment of the law. This is why Paul would go on to say the Galatians, "For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (5:13). When we use our freedom in Christ to live by the Spirit, we who have been freed from the law will fulfill the law (Gal. 5:14, 6:2).

1. *Kevin DeYoung, "The Protestant Debate over Justification: Here I Stand.," The Christian Science Monitor, November 30, 2009, https://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/1130/p09s03-coop.html.*
2. *8. John Piper, "Can You Begin by the Spirit and Be Completed by the Flesh?," Desiring God, March 13, 1983, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/can-you-begin-by-the-spirit-and-be-completed-by-the-flesh.*
3. *Tony Evans, CSB Tony Evans Study Bible, Hardcover (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019).*
4. *Charles Spurgeon, Morning & Evening (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995).*
5. *A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961).*
6. *Timothy Keller, Galatians For You (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013).*
7. *C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Edition, 2001).*

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 96, DDG)

Imputation

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or transferred to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's children live by faith.

Galatians 3

3:21-26. "In verse 21, Paul returns to the statement with which he began verse 19. God never intended His law to 'impart life,' otherwise we could become righteous through it. In fact, 'the Scripture [ie: the Old Testament] declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin' (v 22). Paul's Greek is a bit more vivid than English here. He says, literally, that 'Scripture imprisoned all the world to sin.' This is not a function of Scripture we tend to focus on! Paul is probably remembering his own experience just prior to conversion (see Romans 7:7-13)…The law made him see (and feel) that he was morally helpless. He realized that he was not simply a sinner, but a prisoner of sin, helpless to free or cure himself. This is the purpose of the law. It shows us that we do not just 'fall short' of God's will, requiring some extra effort to do better, but that we are completely under sin's power, requiring a rescue."[6]

"To trust [Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus, if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."[7]

Activity

In small groups, students should produce skits entitled, "You Can Do this the Hard Way, or the Easy Way." The skits should show how we sometimes choose to do things the more difficult way rather than the easy way. It might help to brainstorm a few examples first: for example, someone might insist on trying to fix an appliance him- or-herself instead of calling a professional repair-person; someone might choose to do a shoddy job on his chores even though he knows it means he'll have to redo it later.

Let them share their skits. Ask them why we so often choose to do things the hard way. Is it pride? Ignorance? Point out that in today's session, Paul contrasts the hard way (trying to obey the Law) and the easy way (trusting Jesus).

Ask your students to share examples of how we often resort to the hard way (trying to be good enough) instead of the easy way (trusting in Jesus) to be justified, to break sin's curse, and to free ourselves from bondage. For example, maybe we insist on getting perfect grades in order to feel significant. Whatever examples they give, talk about how trusting in Jesus' perfect atonement for us is way better (and way easier) than our sure-to-fail efforts.

In Defense (p. 98, DDG)

Twice in this passage Paul uses the phrase, "believing what you heard" (Gal. 3:2,5). For Paul, hearing is the mechanism God uses to produce faith, and faith is how we receive the Spirit (Gal. 3:2). Paul says the same thing in Romans—"So faith comes from what is heard" (Rom. 10:17). Therefore, preaching and teaching is central to the work of God. If faith is what brings salvation, and faith comes through hearing, then speaking God's word is an essential element of the Christian life and mission. As John Piper once said in a sermon on this text, "The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He uses the Word to break the spell of confusion and unbelief."[8]

UNITED IN FAITH
God's children live by faith.

JESUS CONNECTION
Paul reminded the church in Galatia of the gospel message: Jesus lived a sinless life, died for our sin and rose again so that we can be saved by grace alone through faith.

LIFEWISE QUALITY
GROWTH – Becoming more mature by learning from my mistakes.

HEAD
What is the purpose of the law of Moses?

Why is it unnecessary for Jesus' followers to rely on the law to save them? What did Paul tell them to rely on instead?

HEART

After coming to faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Galatians were trying to earn their faith by obeying the laws of Moses. What types of "good" things have you done to earn God's approval? Why does Paul call this foolishness?

By faith, we believe that Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law (obeying "rules" to be accepted by God) by dying for us on the cross. Why is it more important to think about our growth as a Christian in terms of faith, not following rules?

HANDS

The goal of growth is always maturity. Draw or cut out and tape a picture of a full-grown, mature tree on a piece of paper. Using Jeremiah 17:8 and Psalm 1 (below), write on the paper words or phrases that God uses to describe what this kind of maturity looks like and where it comes from. Ask God to help you to grow in your faith so that these words can be used to describe you.

- Jeremiah 17:7–8 – "The person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence indeed is the Lord, is blessed. He will be like a tree planted by water: It sends its roots out toward a stream, it doesn't fear when heat comes, and its foliage remains green. It will not worry in a year of drought or cease producing fruit."
- Psalm 1:1–3 – "How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."